

Henry James's Fluid Texts of the 1890s:  
*The Other House* as a Transgeneric Case Study

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Among the privileges enjoyed by fully canonical authors is the collective conviction that they can hardly go wrong. Stephen Dedalus voiced this conviction memorably in *Ulysses* when, referring to Shakespeare, he said, "A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery" (Joyce 243). The object of this paper is not to prove Henry James wrong, for only in truly exceptional circumstances can this type of judgement be made of creative achievement. But it seems there is sufficient evidence, both textual and contextual, to cast in doubt the artistic integrity of Henry James's role as a transgeneric adapter at the turn of the nineteenth century (say from 1896 to 1911), which may affect, in turn, the received thesis that the novels of his major phase were made possible by the experimental explorations of the late 1890s, almost universally interpreted as lessons he learned from his theatrical involvement. More concretely, this paper seeks to examine the transgeneric process undergone by *The Other House*, one of James's *fluid* texts of the period, in order to support the view that his dealings with these texts were not experiments towards a new novel, not even attempts at touching up earlier drafts to improve on them, but rather simple, often self-confessed moves to make the most of ideas, scenarios, or fully accomplished plays that had been met with disfavour by contemporary stage managers and impresarios. Working under the spell of a fully canonical figure constructed, moreover, on the myth of Arnoldian disinterestedness, critics have tended to put down to artistic probing what could be simply described as a consistent endeavour to get rid of unproduced plays with the least possible effort and waste of time.

**The immediate context**

After the end of James's overt infatuation with theatre, which was conveniently signposted by the debacle of his play *Guy Domville* on January 5, 1895, he had to make crucial decisions in order to redefine his career as a writer, heal up his sore ego, and refurbish his finances as much as ever before. The current critical view is that the years between 1895 and 1901—his treacherous years, in Leon Edel's apt expression—form a period of transition and hesitation, and a good index of his troubled mental disposition is the generic instability in which some of his projects, whether *ideés-mère* or more advanced works, remained for years, uneasily poised between drama and narrative, the stage and the page. James's veering away from the practical aspects of theatre after the shock of *Guy Domville*'s first night left him with plenty of material in his hands at different stages of composition which had

been dramatically conceived in the early 1890s and was equally suited for tales as for plays, as he himself acknowledged (e.g. *Complete Notebooks* 80, 81, 85; *Henry James: Letters* 4: 31), and thus ready to assume either form for reasons that turned out to be basically commercial. In temporal order of earliest notebook conception, this material mainly covers *What Maisie Knew* (November 12, 1892), *Summersoft* (November 24, 1892), *The Spoils of Poynton* (December 24, 1893), *The Other House* (December 26, 1893), and *The Awkward Age* (April 19, 1894). Most of these primitive notebook entries, however, were significantly extended and elaborated on at later dates. Two works do not seem to belong to this list for different reasons—"Owen Wingrave" and *The Outcry*. The former was first conceived on May 8, 1892 and published as a tale in that same year; in 1907 it became a one-act play called *The Saloon* which was eventually produced in 1911. Yet, from its very inception in 1892, "Owen Wingrave" was nothing but a narrative—unambiguously branded "a tale" (*Complete Notebooks* 67)—and did not partake of the dual nature of other contemporary *données*. It was never intended for the theatre, like *The American* or *Daisy Miller* in the 1870s, though unforeseen circumstances turned it into one of the four works James managed to see on the boards during his lifetime. *The Outcry*, on the contrary, was a theatrical enterprise from the outset and only became a novel when stage production proved impossible. But its dates of earliest composition and adaptation—1909 and 1911, respectively—displace it from the group of works that allegedly led to James's novels of the major phase.

*What Maisie Knew* and *The Spoils of Poynton* are extensively discussed in scenic terms in successive entries of James's notebooks. According to Edel, both are "dramas encased in fictional form" (Introduction xvii), though they were never scripted for the stage and no regular transgeneric process intervened between notebook conception and periodical serialization in 1897 and 1896. Broadly speaking, both narratives can be characterized as the combination of scenic techniques and mental analysis, that is to say, the formal staples of his later fiction. Representation of the character's mind is the rule rather than the exception, as shown by the abundance of what narratologists call *verba sentiendi*. Yet the mental focus narrows almost exclusively on Maisie Farange and Fleda Vetch who embody, by authorial design, the centre of consciousness of both novels. *The Awkward Age*, for its part, is an altogether different type of narrative. Though consistently discussed in James's preface as a dramatic work presented "on absolutely scenic lines" and "abid[ing] without a moment's deflexion by the principle of the stage-play" (*Art of the Novel* 115), it seldom exhibits the component of mental analysis, of "going behind" the character's observable surface (*Art of the Novel* 111), that turned *Maisie* and *Spoils* into the predecessors of his early twentieth-century novel. *The Awkward Age* is basically a dialogue piece, never written for the stage despite its overriding scenic qualities, and a self-avowed novelty within James's canon on account of its aspiration to consistent dialogic objectivity. He calls his technique "perplexing and delightful" and confesses he adopted it "for a change" and to do "something quite different" (*Art of the Novel* 111). But this formal choice is not as

unique as it might seem, for previous narratives such as *The Other House* or “Covering End,” both explicit rewritings of stage material, had already been structured dialogically in 1896 and 1898, though the handling of mental analysis is more erratic in them than in *The Awkward Age*. Thus, the motives behind the conception of the latter work as an extended dialogue—even if it stands clear of any preceding play or scenario—may lie in James’s wish to do an objective dialogue piece not weighed down by any previous dramatic situation concocted to satisfy the groundlings; in other words, not based on the stultifying concessions he tended to associate with contemporary theatrical success. His acknowledged formal model was the spicy dialogue romance of his French contemporary Gyp (nom de plume of Sibylle Gabrielle Marie Antoniette Riquetti de Mirabeau, Comtesse de Martel de Janville, no less), whom he calls a “mistress, in her levity, of one of the happiest of forms” (*Art of the Novel* 106), a form which he adapted to the taste of British readers by archly substituting “the recurrent and affixed ‘said he’ and ‘said she’” (*Art of the Novel* 107) for the names prefixed to the lines of dialogue in the usual script format.

The works so far reviewed belong together for three reasons—their overall scenic design whether combined or not with mental analysis, their compact dates of conception (1892-94) and execution (1896-99), and the fact that they were never scripted for stage production. Two other works listed above fulfil, however, all but the last condition and should be considered separately. Their generic fluidness, their dual nature, is not simply announced in the notebooks as a theoretical possibility, but fully actualized in their compositional histories. *Summersoft*, for instance, was first written as a one-act play for the American actress Ellen Terry in 1895; then transformed into “Covering End,” a tale published in 1898 in the same volume as “The Turn of the Screw”; and finally rewritten as *The High Bid*, a three-act play that went on the boards in 1908. *The Other House* follows the same pattern. It was first conceived in 1893 “as a story . . . which would greatly resemble a play” (*Complete Notebooks* 85); then it was expanded into scenario form not later than December 21, 1895 for consideration by stage manager Edward Compton (*Complete Notebooks* 146). When production fell through, James novelized it and brought it out as a serial in the *Illustrated London News* and, shortly afterwards, in book form in 1896. Eventually, it became a full-blown play in 1909, but, following James’s customary ill luck with the stage, it was never premièred during his lifetime. *The High Bid* sequence was dealt with elsewhere (Álvarez-Amorós), and it is now *The Other House* that takes the focus and contributes evidence to illuminate James’s pragmatic stance towards his profession and creative materials at the turn of the nineteenth century.

### **James’s ephemeral new manner**

However sympathetically one looks on it, *The Other House* was stark, shameless melodrama from its earliest notebook conception in 1893. Contemporary reviewers

soon perceived James's change of tack, his "new vein" (unsigned rev., Gard 261), and described it as "a revolution," as "something new" (unsigned rev., Gard 263), and, more elaborately, as an attempt to give up "the chiaroscuro of faintly lit drawing-rooms . . . and veiled emotions" for the representation of "life at high tide" (unsigned rev., Gard 289). Though James admitted that his *donnée* was as good for a play as for a tale, he first developed it as a prospective drama for the average theatre-goer and then as a narrative "energetically designed to meet . . . [the] requirements of a 'love-story,'" with which "to capture the public of the *Illustrated [London] News*" (*Henry James: Letters* 4: 30), a popular journal that might bring him money, he hoped, but no increase in highbrow reputation. Reduced to its barest essentials, *The Other House* recounts the events triggered by a deathbed vow. As it transpires, dying Julia Bream exacts from her husband Tony Bream the solemn promise that he will never remarry during the lifetime of their little daughter Effie to protect her from the evils of stepmotherhood. When she dies, two young women contend for the widower's love, Rose Armiger and Jean Martle, i.e. James's "Bad Heroine" and "Good Heroine," respectively, of his notebook entry (*Complete Notebooks* 81). While the latter is discreet and collected in the best tradition of Victorian propriety, Rose is bold, outspoken, perverse, independent—in sum, a fin-de-siècle Becky Sharp going to unthinkable lengths to have her way. She schemes right and left to win Tony for herself and deactivate the vow, until, consumed by passion and jealousy, drowns little Effie and blames it on Jean in the mad hope of removing two obstacles at a stroke as she cynically admits later when she says, "All I can answer is that I might none the less have succeeded. People *have*—in worse conditions."<sup>1</sup> A final inquiry of sorts conducted by Mrs. Beever and Dr. Ramage, the family physician, unveils the grisly truth. Yet Rose is allowed, in Medean fashion, to leave the country untouched by the law whose punitive role is entrusted to her conscience, a lenient judge if one considers her shocking behaviour. In the end, Rose's plan disastrously misfires. The binding force of the vow disappears with Effie's death and the only requited love affair in the story, that between Tony and Jean, eventually triumphs though both lovers are bitterly conscious of the dreadful price of their freedom.

Two plot strands are discernible here. First, a thrilling love intrigue with "[t]wo girls . . . in the forefront of it," according to James's sensational description for his editor (*Henry James: Letters* 4: 31); then, after Effie's drowning at the end of Book Second in the novel and Act Second in the subsequent play, a murder story with touches of detective and courtroom fiction, including cross-examination of potential witnesses, exposure of false clues, reconstruction of characters' deeds and movements, analysis of time and space factors, and, as a disturbing coda, the hushing up of the murder and the banishment of the murderess. Focusing on the love intrigue, *The Other House* has been interpreted by Jennifer L. Jenkins as a narrative of unsuccessful female containment, of how domesticity fails to restrain desire, and of the dangers to social and cultural order implicit in young, unmarried, independent women. Furthermore, overshadowed by a set of ostensibly

heterosexual relations, Priscilla L. Walton has detected a strong undercurrent of homoeroticism that binds together Rose Armiger and Julia Bream, close friends from boarding school days, as well as Tony Bream and Dennis Vidal through the admiration of the former for the latter's manly disposition and, near the end, for his generous gesture of taking Rose under his care and removing her from the crime scene. The setting itself seems to be intended for the intensified development of both plots along dramatic lines. The two houses implied in the title—Bounds and Eastmead—and the garden connecting them form a kind of self-contained microcosm that accepts no external interference that might unsettle either the precise geometry of criss-crossing love affairs or the detection of the murderer. Reading *The Other House* feels like watching a game of draughts, or, if one considers the criminal component, like observing Hercule Poirot's algebraic methods on board the claustrophobic coaches of the Orient Express. No wonder that, when it was rewritten as a play in 1909, *The Other House* became a foil for other contemporary dramas like *The High Bid*, *The Saloon*, and *The Outcry* on account of its lack of explicit ideological purpose—except for the Jenkins-Walton interpretation in terms of sexual politics, this narrative contains little more than a set of love affairs run amok in the English countryside.

A moot point with *The Other House* is the issue of characterization. Owing to the high proportion of dialogue, the construction of character heavily relies on external signs, whether speech, gesture, or appearance, and, given the inherent indeterminacy of the method, critical disagreement on James's success generally prevails. Brenda Murphy, for instance, talks of "psychological investigation," and argues that "[t]he center of *The Other House* . . . is in the character not in the action" and that departure from "the simplistic moral assumptions of melodrama" brings the work closer to the complexity of realism (91). On the contrary, critics such as Gorley Putt, Rudolph Kossmann, and David K. Kirby point out that *The Other House* fails through "faulty characterization" (Kirby 51; see also Putt [209], 311, and Kossmann 99) in line with the main weakness generally observed in his theatrical endeavours, that is, his limited capacity to bring out character only by dramatic means, without resorting to the painstaking analysis of psychological interiority. In this connection, the case of Rose Armiger is paradigmatic. Having outgrown her middling role in James's notebook entry and become the central character, she is *never* presented from within, her motives are not penetrated, and she remains psychologically opaque, a rule that is frequently relaxed for lesser members of the cast. She is evil *per se*, like an evil Guignol puppet, and this fits very well the melodramatic programme. We may infer her feelings from observable indices, but given as she is to lying and adopting all sorts of masks, the result is at best uncertain and at worst it leaves the persistent impression that we are confronting an authorial ruse to underdetermine her personality. For these reasons, and by all normal assumptions, there is hardly any "psychological investigation" in the case of Rose Armiger, her apparent complexity resulting rather from the mechanical attribution of two sets of behavioural traits (helpfulness, vitality, grace, style vs.

cruelty, duplicity, egotism, callousness) that look disturbing or at least odd when seen to operate together.

*The Other House* was not included by James in the New York Edition of his novels and tales, and it is no simple task to ascertain the reasons for its omission. In the introduction to his 1948 edition of the novel, Leon Edel belittles the absence and puts it down to “rigid selection” and to the theatrical origin of the work as a play-scenario (vii; see also Edel, “Architecture” 171). Philip Horne more or less concurs and talks of “the commercial economy of the strictly contingent demands of publishers that threaten to reduce his [James’s] intentions to senseless brevity,” as well as of the differences between “enforced and voluntary omissions” (13). This obviously seems to imply that the exclusion of *The Other House* was a pragmatic imposition fairly unrelated to James’s artistic ranking of his own material. Several factors, however, undermine this notion. First, the New York Edition was initially planned to comprise 16 volumes; then it grew into 23, and finally it came out in 24. At no point of this gradual growth did *The Other House* qualify to become part of it, a privilege that was readily granted to an unremarkable novella such as *The Reverberator* (1888). Furthermore, none of the provisional tables of contents contemplated by James in 1908 and later pruned for lack of space feature *The Other House* (Anesko, “Friction” 155-60), which supports the view that it was never seriously considered for the Edition. So the question of physical limits, important as it was, did not entirely justify the exclusion in hand. Two other clues seem to carry more conviction—James’s decision to place the serial version in an illustrated journal well noted for its popular sensationalism and his later toying with the idea of reprinting *The Other House* in Thomas Nelson’s Seven-Penny Library (Anesko, “Allegiances” 87). Both moves tend to show that he was always conscious of the true nature and readership of his novel and that its right place was hardly the opulent volumes of his particular *comédie humaine*.

### **Textual history: facts and presumptions**

From the angle of textual development and personal motivation, *The High Bid* and *The Other House* are analogous cases, as was suggested above. There is, however, one crucial difference that complicates the analysis of the transgeneric process and has allowed for critical imprecision and general confusion—while the textual sequence leading to *The High Bid* is complete and fully documented, there is a missing link in the case of *The Other House*, for the initial dramatic phase never went beyond the scenario format and, worst of all, it has not been preserved. This means that a sizeable part of the transgeneric analysis must remain hypothetical, though there is indirect evidence that the scenario existed and formed the basis for the narrative rewriting of this work in 1896. Given this fact, it seems that the description and assessment of how James’s 1893 notes became a play in 1909 through several intervening stages calls for a clear notion of what was implied in

each of these stages, as well as a balanced and realistic consideration of the losses implicit in the existence of a missing link.

Some hints have already been given about the generic ambivalence of James's *données* in the early 1890s. While shaping in his mind the germ for *The Other House* in 1893, he wonders, "Is there something for a tale, is there something for a play, in something that might be a little like the following?"; then he speaks of "the 1st chapter of my story—by which I mean the 1st act of my play" (*Complete Notebooks* 80, 81), and, retaining the same view almost three years later, he describes his idea to Clement K. Shorter, the editor of the *Illustrated London News*, as "lend[ing] itself equally well to a play—'of incident,' or to a novel—of the same" (*Henry James: Letters* 4: 31). This sustained duality has proved contagious. Later critics seem to be uncannily affected by the perception of familiar objects, such as plays, that come mediated by the conventions of another genre. And then, for instance, they discuss the first and second books of *The Other House* (novel), respectively, as "the first act" (Jenkins 175) and "an unusually long second act" (Isle 58); they forget they are dealing with a narrative and refer imperturbably to "the conventions of tragedy and the late 19th-century stage" (Isle 75); or, in the height of bafflement, they seem to imply that *The Other House* (novel) is a version of itself—"This novel, in either of its versions [i.e. novel and play] . . ." (Greenwood 159)—when what they really mean is that the story of Rose Armiger and Tony Bream was successively cast in the conventions of two different genres.

This is not all, however. Contagion extends to the very nature of the missing link. James calls it "a rough sketch" (*Complete Notebooks* 85) and "un projet détaillé et abandonné de pièce en 3 actes" (letter to Paul Bourget, qtd. in Edel, Introduction xi), but *also* a "three act play" (letter to Auguste Monod, *Letters to Benson and Monod* 107) and an "idle little play" (letter to Frederick Solger, qtd. in Tucker 215n19). Lacking concrete textual evidence to be more precise, critics have followed suit. For Edel, the 1896 novel was written "not from a finished play but from . . . [a] rough sketch, scenario or project" which "was not found among his [James's] posthumous papers" (Introduction xi; but see also *Life* 4: 165). At variance with this received opinion, Matthiessen and Murdock speak of an "original play" when a few lines above they have only described it as "a plan" (142, 141); McElderry calls it "a full-length play" (95), Isle a "stage play" (76), Brooks "his play" (133), Shine "a three-act play" (78), and Tucker, non-committally, "his old notes" (16). All this could be dismissed as mere nominalism, despite the strong implications of using one term or another. Yet things grow more complicated when critics get so carried away that they manage to conjure up a lost sketch, grant it the status of an *extant* play, and discuss the features of the subsequent novel with reference to an imaginary source text, probably on the unconscious assumption that the 1909 drama is identical with the lost scenario which leads them to play havoc with temporal and causal relations. For Jacques Barzun, James took "a three-act play which he had on hand and by the addition of a few introductory pages turned . . . [it] into a novel" (515). Isle goes much further when he argues that the novel's worth lies in James's

capacity to make “the melodrama he had conceived for the stage into a dramatic novel,” achieving “greater psychological depth and a more tragic vision” and revitalizing “the dramatic (or melodramatic) structure carried over from the play” (41). Obviously, most of what he says—note the pointless comparative expressions *greater* and *more tragic*, predicated on a void—is genuine guesswork, as when he discusses Rose’s character and claims that it supersedes its stereotypical nature because James “is able to do in the novel what he had been unable to do in a play” (57).

Whatever its nature, the missing link should not be identified with the 1893 notebook entry, as Greenwood wrongly does when he maintains that “the novel . . . first appeared in the notebooks in 1893 as a play scenario” (148). It is unthinkable that stage manager Edward Compton had been asked to make a production decision on a two-page long sketch, especially when James often underlines both the provisionality of his conception—“the vaguest skeleton,” he calls it (*Complete Notebook* 81)—and his unwillingness to go into details. Besides, when two years later James notes down a list of creative ideas at different stages of development, he describes *The Promise* (the earlier title for *The Other House*) as “the *donnée* that I sketched (I have it all), as a 3-act play for poor E. C. [Edward Compton]” (*Complete Notebook* 146). The “I have it all” of this description revealingly contrasts with the ideas of brevity, roughness, imperfection, and tentativeness so heavily emphasized in the original notebook entry.

The temporal milestones in the evolution from the initial idea to the lost scenario are at least four. First, the *donnée* recorded in his notebooks on December 26, 1893; second, another notebook entry dated January 23, 1894, in which he admits having “commenced a rough sketch under the *étiquette* of *The Promise*” (*Complete Notebooks* 85) based on the said *donnée*; third, his intimation that the scenario was finished and perhaps already revised and turned down by Compton (December 21, 1895); and fourth, his letter to the editor of the *Illustrated London News* negotiating the terms for the serialization of *The Other House* (January 24, 1896), which clearly shows his failure to have it staged. Of the scenario itself we know nothing certain about its length, its scenic structure, the development of dialogue and stage indications as compared to later versions of the story, and, in particular, which disparities between the notebook entry and the novel already existed in it. As to length and general development, Edel believes it was a fairly advanced work and supports his opinion on the “punctuality with which he [James] now dispatched his instalments” (*Life* 4: 165) for serial publication to take place between July and September 1896. But in a letter dated August 28, 1896, James apologizes to Edmund Gosse for his protracted epistolar silence and blames it on the composition of the serial instalments for *The Other House*, which “proved a much slower and more difficult job than I expected . . . and made my existence a nightmare” (*Henry James: Letters* 4: 33-34). Apparently, James’s punctuality resulted from his wish to oblige his editor rather than from the simplicity of the task in hand. With respect to the alterations introduced by James en route from the notebook sketch to the narrative



version, four seem especially relevant—the choice between poison and drowning for Effie’s murder; the shift of focus from Tony Bream’s vow and attending moral circumstances to Rose’s violent passion and crime; the reversal of the happy ending originally envisaged for the story; and the fact that Tony’s vow is disclosed to all characters at once by Mrs. Beever and Dr. Ramage at the end of Book First and not selectively to a few of them.

The poison vs. drowning issue merits some discussion as it is a measure of the difficulties posed by the loss of the scenario phase. In his notebooks, James’s “Bad Heroine,” still nameless, “determines to poison the child” (*Complete Notebooks* 81), while in the novel Effie is drowned in the stream that separates both houses. One wonders, of course, why and when this alteration was effected. As far as reasons go, two at least could be put forward—boosting the unconventional aspects of Rose’s character, such as her determination, cruelty, nerve, and capacity for direct physical involvement as against the more womanly method of poison; and the weight of literary influence focused around Henrik Ibsen’s 1894 drama *Little Eyolf*, in which a little child is also drowned. The second reason, however, is entangled with temporal issues.

In the introduction to his edition of *The Other House*, Edel quotes a 1897 letter in which James refers to *Little Eyolf* and acknowledges “the acceptance of the small Ibsen spell . . . ” (xvi). But 1897 is too late to prove that James was familiar with Ibsen’s play in time to be influenced by it. More conclusive is the evidence supplied in 1987 by Adeline R. Tintner in the form of four letters to William Heinemann and Mr. Pawling dated November 1894, in which James discusses the unpublished translation of *Little Eyolf* as he receives successive portions of it (233-36). Therefore, it is perfectly possible that the lost scenario had already included Effie’s death by drowning and the novel just reflected this fact from the outset. Things are not so simple, though. Serial instalments published from July to September 1896 were illustrated by Walter Paget and *all* carried a sensational running headpiece that shows Rose Armiger holding a poison cup in her left hand while a diabolic apparition in the background encourages her to proceed with her murderous purpose. This is either a remarkable coincidence or proof that in the early stages of the narrative version, when illustrations are discussed with the author, James still adhered to poisoning and only discarded this when he was well into the novel. Apart from Edel’s endorsement of this view (Introduction xiii), there is an early, unnoticed passage in *The Other House* that backs it by emphasizing Rose’s familiarity with medicines and potions, as if justifying in advance her capacity to handle poisonous substances. In Book First, when given a prescription by Dr. Ramage to be taken to the chemist’s, Rose is said “to recognize at a glance its nature” (*OH/N* 16), and this statement survived the new murdering method eventually adopted by James.<sup>2</sup> If this interpretation holds, then two points follow from it. First, his change of mind did not move him to persuade his editor to adapt the graphic setting of the story to its new content, probably because he did not think much of the whole enterprise, including illustrations, the journal, its

readership, and even his own work. Indeed, another reason for choosing drowning instead of poisoning could be a deliberate response to the high sensationalism of the *Illustrated London News*, where, he might have thought, to be thrilling was to be successful. Second, and more importantly, the lost scenario—whether a draft or a fully accomplished work—*must have featured poison* as the instrument of murder, in which case there is a wide margin to presume that it also reproduced the happy ending of the notebook sketch, where nobody dies and the vow is simply bypassed. If the scenario design was so close to the original conception and thus fairly distinct from the serialized novel, then James's complaints to Gosse about the slowness and difficulty of his endeavour ring true and the critical importance of the scenario perceptibly diminishes. In fact, what James showed Compton might have been a light comedy and not a dark play with a cruel, disturbing denouement. With the evidence in hand, however, all this is just a plausible hypothesis, but not a certainty.

After serialization in the *Illustrated English News* and publication in book form by Heinemann on October 1, 1896, James did not think of reconverting *The Other House* into a play until more than a decade later. In a letter to Frederick Solger dated January 19, 1908, he refuses to extract a play from the novel, though he concedes the task would not be difficult. Retracing the stream of composition could be done “as easily as a bather in a full tub steps, his bath ended, out of the water” (qtd. in Tucker 215n19). Of course, the amusing simile fits very well the idea of generic fluidness associated with *The Other House* and other Jamesian texts of the same period. Overworked by selection, revision, preface-writing and proof-correcting for the New York Edition of his novels and tales, it is only natural that James deferred turning his novel back into a play. Some months later, however, and possibly stimulated by the première of *The High Bid* on March 26, 1908, he began to work on another scenario to see if this time he could accommodate producers, and he managed to finish it in early September 1908 (Edel, Introduction xix). Though this second scenario has not survived either, its loss is not as problematic as that of the first. On the one hand, the closeness between the novel and the final play is such that renders the scenario almost unnecessary; on the other, it is not a substantial link in the transgeneric chain, it does not represent a generic transition, it is just an aid, a preliminary, utilitarian version of an extant play. That James was unable to use the earlier scenario and had to write another may support the hypothesis that major changes occurred between the former and the 1896 narrative version, as suggested above. After eight months of apparent inactivity, he met Granville-Barker on April 29, 1909 to discuss the play, which he finally completed between June and July of that same year, a letter to Mrs. W. K. Clifford dated July 19 acting as a precise ante quem limit (*Letters of Henry James* 2: 133-35). Despite James's hopes that Herbert Trench would mount the play for the Haymarket Theatre, it was soon dropped and never produced during his lifetime.

The composition of the stage version of *The Other House* can be further clarified by a short note addressed by James to Gertrude Kingston on October 17, 1911 (*Henry James: Letters* 4: 586). It is, in fact, a cover letter accompanying an unknown

version of the script for *The Other House* and seems an obliging move on James's part in response to some interest in the play, since he advises that "any possible producer, or even interpreter, should read it exactly as it here stands." In other words, and more than two years after Trench had refused to stage the play, James still retained hopes of production and was open to all types of offers. The essential passages in the note deal with the length of the script and his dislike of the term "prologue" for the initial section of the play. James first pre-empts Mrs. Kingston's alarm at the "apparent voluminosity" of the text by admitting that "it is full of representational and expressional indications . . . which swell it out" and also that "it will demand further compression" to be undertaken "when performance is really in question . . . on the terrible time-basis." Then he disowns his earlier choice of the term "prologue" and claims that "the thing is four straightforward Acts."

Read in context, James's words pose as many questions as they answer. He seems to be talking of two phases of compression, one to lift a scenario from the novel, a scenario still encumbered with stage directions both "representational and expressional," i.e. giving kinetic, gestural, and paralinguistic details, whose abundance and explicitness is quite in line with the narrator's frame text of its fictional predecessor; and another which will turn the said scenario into an actable play "on the terrible time-basis," not on any principle of artistic propriety. What is important to note is that the second phase of compression was contingent on the play being actually produced and this *never* happened. So there is a very real possibility that the piece published by Edel in *The Complete Plays of Henry James* is identical with or quite close to what James sent Mrs. Kingston in 1911. In the first place, and considering that James detested cuts, Edel chose the longest version among four extant ones in agreement with his proclaimed editorial policy ("Note on the Texts" 819), and, by all common standards, it was a long text indeed. It has almost 28,800 words of dialogue and close to 22,900 of stage directions and turn-taking material, totalizing a respectable 51,700 words, that is, more than 72% of the novel's word count. Numbers alone confirm that the text was "full of representational and expressional indications" and that further cuts in dialogue would probably be required to make it fit in the usual time slots for dramatic performances. Moreover, the so-called "prologue" was never rechristened an "act," despite James's lack of enthusiasm for that term.

Resistance to cuts is dramatically expressed by James in his letter to Mrs. W. K. Clifford above, where he confesses he is "sickened and appalled" by them and that the "sacrifice of the very life-blood of one's play . . . is the nauseating side of the whole desperate job" (*Letters of Henry James* 2: 133). Hatred of cuts and general resentment against "the terrible time-basis" are so well-known among Jamesians that one is surprised to see a critic like David K. Kirby conceive of cuts and compression as deliberate tools used by James to make "the play . . . a better work of art than the novel . . . to correct the errors that were previously noted" (50). Cutting down on words was not a symptom of James's coming to grips with a flawed work to improve on it for art's sake, but rather of managerial impositions to

squeeze his material within the temporal conventions of the target genre. Pleasing readers fed on the New Critical stereotype that shorter is better may be an additional asset of the resulting work, but not the primary object of “the whole desperate job” undertaken by James. Kirby’s claim would have made more sense had the novel been compressed for republishing within the same genre or if James had not been subjected to the pragmatic aspects of staging, but neither was obviously the case.

### **Across genres? How much?**

In her widely read *Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon argues that the adapted text “is not something to be reproduced, but rather something to be interpreted and recreated, often in a new medium” (84). Apart from revisiting the customary issues of transmediality and transcoding from a formal angle, she proposes three modes whereby audiences can be engaged by cultural artefacts—telling, showing, and interacting—or, in other words, how novels, plays, or games capture the attention of readers, spectators, or players (22-27). Hutcheon’s neat categories beg the question as to what mode of engagement would hold for one of James’s plays that never went on the boards and stemmed, moreover, from an incomplete process of transcoding that left it astride the narrative and the dramatic genres. Apart from “dramas encased in fictional form” (Edel, Introduction xvii; see above), critics have called James’s fluid texts of the 1890s “plays printed as novels” (Isle 4), “described drama[s]” (Ferguson 51), and even “extended prompt-book[s]” (Perosa 55), which emphasizes the uncanny feeling provoked by these strange creatures. Authorial intentions are clearly transmedial and transgeneric, i.e. James’s purpose was actually to transcend generic bounds, but his handling of the text does not fully warrant such intentions both when a play becomes a narrative and the reverse. Transcoding is frequently restricted to planting a set of inorganic, conventional indices in the text, and quite frequently, besides, the resulting drama, when such is the case, never achieved the completion of performance. So in James, and specifically in the case of *The Other House*, there is a perceptible divide between intention and enactment, authorial resolution and actual text, which promotes reproduction to the detriment of recreation.

The parallel collation of the narrative and dramatic versions of *The Other House* yields a set of facts, some more obvious than others, to be discussed below. First, the sectional structure of both works is basically the same. The novel has three books and the play three acts plus a prologue. Book First and Book Third correspond exactly to the Prologue and Act Third, whereas Book Second is artificially divided into Act First and Act Second in the play, although there is no break in action, locality, or time. In rough numbers, the word count of novel and play is 71,400 and 51,700, respectively, and there is an expectable reversal in the proportion of narrator’s discourse in the novel (52.5%) and stage directions in the

play (44.3%) as against characters' dialogue in both (47.5% and 55.7%), though the weight of stage directions is quite high indeed. The cuts made in transit from the novel to the play are more severe in the initial sections and gradually dwindle to nothing. While Book First and the initial part of Book Second respectively lose 43.4% and 36.5% of their word count, the last part of Book Second is cut by 12.5% and Book Third by a negligible 0.27%. This steady progression reflects the necessity of equalizing the lengths of the four sections of the play for staging purposes, without tampering with the denouement as it was exactly conceived of for the novel.

Probably, the most significant of these numbers is the large proportion of stage directions (44.3%), though *The High Bid*, a contemporary play with an identical transgeneric history, has a massive 51.9%. Such hypertrophy suggests James's unwillingness or incapacity to perform a successful transcoding, or, in simpler words, to give up his controlling role as an omniscient novelist and construct the dramatic world by means of concrete indications and self-supporting dialogue, leaving a reasonable margin for the final adaptation implied in actual performance and carried out by actors and directors, whom, incidentally, he never trusted. So predetermined is the setting and the physical and emotional aspects of acting in *The High Bid* and in the play version of *The Other House* that, for Kossmann, reading either "constitutes a complete performance" (84). The tendency to retain features of the source genre goes beyond the overwhelming presence of stage directions as a theatrical correlative of narratorial discourse; it operated *both* when the novel became a play *and* when the initial scenario was novelized, in a consistent lagging behind that puzzled contemporary reviewers of the 1896 novel ignorant as they were of its dramatic precedents.<sup>3</sup> Leaving aside the proportion of dialogue, the novel is stagy in its abundance of scenic narration made up of short, concrete, physical actions, in its foregrounding of the relative movements and positions of characters, and in its adherence to a rigid spatio-temporal framework. "Dennis," the narrator tells us, "had raised his head and sunk back into the angle of the bench, separated from her by such space as it yielded" (*OH/N* 156); Manning closes a door "standing, however, with her hand on the knob and looking across, as if . . . to listen to another which exactly balanced with it on the opposite side of the room" (*OH/N* [187]-88); and Dennis again "turned straight away from her . . . to the window and, with his back presented, stood looking out . . ." (*OH/N* 190). But the staginess is almost comic in the way characters come into the narrative focus, their appearance being anticipated by another character, by the topic of conversation, or by both. Rose and Tony talk of her marriage prospects and, when she says that it is Dennis Vidal who must pronounce on them, Tony exclaims, "'Happily, I see! Just look a him'" (*OH/N* 26), whereupon Dennis enters the room. At another point, it is Rose who announces Mrs. Beever's presence, "'Here's Mrs. Beever'" (*OH/N* 58), and, sure enough, she appears preceded by the butler. Later, when Dennis is conversing with Mrs. Beever and expresses his wish to see Rose, Mrs. Beever timely replies, "Here she is," and, indeed, "Rose Armiger stood there" (*OH/N* 194). Apart from

these samples of badly-digested theatrical strategies implemented by characters, entrances and exits are emphasized by the narrator so constantly and elaborately that the whole game seems almost parodic.

The drama version also suffers from a similar lagging behind. It is not only the sheer weight of stage directions, but the type of information conveyed in them. While the novelist creates a discursive world that is imaginatively enacted by the reader, what the playwright produces is a sophisticated set of instructions so that others can conjure up a three-dimensional world on the stage. Therefore, turning narratorial discourse more or less directly into stage indications will be pointless if the play is enacted and mystifying if it is read in script form. In the first case, most indications will be lost on the audience owing to the impossibility of acting them out, while in the second the gap between what is written and what can be verisimilarly played out will be so wide as to seem intolerable if not laughable. The dramatic text of *The Other House* is packed with impracticable stage directions such as "*As having taken her [Rose] in, across the dusky room, as a creature different now from anything she has ever been,*"<sup>4</sup> "*without vehemence, but with clear deep cogency and plausibility*" (OH/P 742), "*passive, submissive, as with no movement but to close his eyes before the new-born dread of her caress . . . the dire confession of her hard embrace, the long entreaty of her stony kiss*" (OH/P 745), "*Who has turned away, all a prey to his last truth*" (OH/P 748), "*bringing out his works at last, however, with more of a suggestion of mercy*" (OH/P 750), "*As even living it over again for herself; as seeing it almost as a passage or a picture of the history of anothers person*" (OH/P 756), and so on. Even similes that fit well in the novel are incongruously reproduced in the stage directions, as when Tony and Jean are said to stand "*like a pair who, walking on a frozen lake, suddenly have in their ears the great crack of the ice*" (OH/N 125; verbatim in the play OH/P 717), and later when "*Rose's mask is the mask of Medusa*" (OH/N 128) becomes "*Then turning from one to the other, with her [Rose's] mask that is as the mask of Medusa*" (OH/P 738). Obviously all this is not actable in the accepted sense of the word, and neither is the following description of how Tony reacts to Rose's ironic query, "*Recognising the question as of a kind that his chronic good-nature and sociability . . . can always meet with princely extravagance*" (OH/P 695). Both "*chronic*" and "*always*" have gnomic overtones that extend beyond the concrete act of recognizing and into the less temporally-constrained realm of characterization.

A second fact is the close identity of the scenic structure of both works. If we understand "scene" as a unit of action marked off by the entrance and exit of characters, there is a striking coincidence about who takes the narrative focus or occupies the physical stage at every moment. Exceptions are few and only two seem relevant and merit discussion. One has to do with James's efforts to remove Effie from the play as a minor character and reduce her role to that of an abstract prime mover of tragedy, since she is the alleged object of the vow made by Tony at his wife's request. She occasionally takes focus in the novel and even utters a few words, but, most importantly, she is a silent eyewitness to the showdown between Rose and Jean just before the murder. According to Kirby, for instance, her physical

removal seeks to turn her into a symbol (52), but perhaps she is absent for the practical difficulty of maintaining a protracted, heated exchange while holding a four-year old girl in one's arms. Whatever the reason, James's new conception of this climactic scene made him alter the cast and setting of five neighbouring scenes to justify Effie's being out of sight for the audience, but nor for the actors who, at a given moment, even address her endearingly through an open window (*OH/P* 725-26). The other exception comes right at the end of the play. It does not modify its denouement, but the lingering effect on audience or reader is quite different. After Paul's conversation with Rose and his artless confession that he would have done "[e]verything" to save her (*OH/P* 756), Rose leaves for good with Dennis, and Paul is left alone on the stage in a wretched emotional condition that bespeaks his silent love for her. But the novel has an additional scene between Paul and Tony in which the latter ruefully comments on the ghastly consequences of having been liked too much (*OH/N* 228). Other deviations are entirely local and can only be discerned if background characters—especially servants—are considered on a par with central characters engaged in plot-advancing conversations. In the novel, for instance, there is a run of scenes exactly identical to those in the play, except for the fact that Manning and an unnamed maid are silently dismantling the tea table in the distance while leading characters rotate (*OH/N* 169-78). Strictly speaking, the scenic parallel would only hold if the two maids were perceived as background elements rather than full characters in their own right.

A third fact is that the most stable component of both versions of *The Other House* is dialogue. Differences exist, of course, and can be locally significant, but not as much as could be expected from a genuinely transmedial process. Large dialogic fragments pass intact from the novel to the play, throwing into relief the unconventional nature of the former. Apart from cuts and imperative adjustments to fit the context, the main source of discrepancy lies in dramatic dialogue conveying information given in the novel directly by the narrator or by different modes of speech rendering embedded in narratorial discourse. Early in the novel we are told that the bank jointly owned by Mrs. Beever and Tony Bream is "the pride of Wilverley, the high clear arch of which the two houses [Bounds and Eastmead] were the solid piers" (*OH/N* [1]), an image that Rose later paraphrases in the play as "the two houses . . . [being] nevertheless about as different as possible, though, indeed, as pillars and props on either side, of the Bank" (*OH/P* 681). This is followed by a longish exchange between Rose and Jean through which the audience is apprised of facts that the narrator provided in the opening paragraphs of the novel. Quite frequently, however, what changes is not the source of information—i.e. narrator or character—but the method chosen to render it. In the novel, "[Rose] replied that as she was fidgety and wanted a walk she would perform the errand herself" (*OH/N* 16), a snatch of reported speech that becomes direct speech in the play, "I'll [Rose] take it myself—for the *walk*: I'm too fidgety to hang about" (*OH/P* 685). This procedure recurs throughout both versions of *The Other House*. Its origin in the novel is not only reported speech (*OH/N* 11, 104, 145-46), but also other

indirect modes of speech rendering such as narrated speech (OH/N 22, 29, 31, 105, 147) or even free indirect speech (OH/N 67, 136).

A fourth fact is what might be called the sequentiality of cuts. Though less substantial than could be expected, there is a reduction of some 20,000 words in the dramatic text of *The Other House*. Cuts are generally made by excising *whole* blocks of narrator's discourse, but also of dialogue. The weight of dialogue in the play grows from 47.5% to 55.7%, though it decreases by about 5,000 words in absolute figures. The crucial issue is that James does not engage in a systematic rewriting of his novel as a play, in a transmedial recreation organically achieved through the development of his *idée-mère* within the conventions of another genre, but rather in the sequential elimination of textual blocks that, for some reason, he thought more dispensable than others. When a chunk of the novel has to go, it seldom leaves behind more than a gap, which is easily revealed by a parallel reading of both works. In fact, if one loses track in the play of a passage occurring in the novel, all one has to do is scroll down a little and parallel continuity is promptly resumed. Although the usual pattern is that the play sustains the cuts, there are occasional additions, the net result being the loss of words just indicated. The most significant absence affects the narratorial sections that open the three books of the novel (OH/N [1]-7, [73]-75, [187]-88). They formally disappear from the play, though some of the most utilitarian information contained in them is distributed between stage directions and characters' dialogue when such information refers, respectively, to physical setting and to other characters, their personality, or their past deeds. Apart from the omission of these opening paragraphs, block cuts greatly reduce the section of Book First in which Rose and Dennis Vidal meet again, discuss their marriage prospects, and break their engagement. On the contrary, Book Third of the novel is quantitatively and almost qualitatively replicated in Act Three of the play, which is as close as *The Other House* comes to mere reproduction instead of adaptation.

Finally, a fifth fact is the existence of traces of "going behind" —i.e. mental analysis—in the stage directions of the play, another leftover from its fictional phase. Although the novel is largely dialogic, the presentation of mental activity is frequent, yet selective. Being a serial whodunnit with three candidates to the role of murderer—Rose, Jean, and Tony, the latter through self-incrimination—hidden motives must remain hidden until final disclosure. Rose's mind, for instance, is opaque as to her overall purposes and behaviour, though, at special moments, we may be granted glimpses of her mental state or the motivation for gestures or replies; but only through guesswork can we learn when she actually resolved to murder Effie or when she realized that her plan had been defeated. Stage directions form, in principle, an awkward setting for mental analysis,<sup>5</sup> and James's attempt to dispose of it only achieved a qualified success.

Quite often, instances of inner focus simply disappear because they are embedded in textual sections that James decided to forgo or trim down. Fine examples of this are two passages centred around Tony Bream and variously



related to Jean Martle and his growing awareness of her (OH/N 61-62, 117-19). *Verba sentiendi* are constant indices of psychological interiority—"sense," "purpose," "thought of," "occurred to him," "felt," "wondered," "knew," "aware of," "interested," "seemed to him," "ask himself," "remarked to himself," "satisfied himself," etc.—and the presence of non-canonical free indirect thought contributes to foregrounding Tony's mindset and perceptions. The second of these passages vanishes from the play in its entirety, while the first becomes a shorter stage direction that retains its novelistic flavour by oddly preserving an inner focus on Tony through *verba sentiendi* and words of estrangement, that is, the two standard methods—either certainty or conjecture—used for invoking mental life in literary texts. Both exist in the stage directions of *The Other House*, but conjecturing through the omnipresent "as" or "as if" and less frequent terms such as "*it would seem*" (OH/P 722), "*not invisibly*" (OH/P 725), and "*apparently*" (OH/P 749) greatly outnumber the cases in which characters' mental states are presented as authoritative facts. Stage directions thus refer to Rose's "*inward drama*" (OH/P 693) or "*her rueful comprehension of the present terms of her peace*" (OH/P 731); to Dennis Vidal "*[o]nly wanting to meet her as far on the way to a quiet honourable life*" (OH/P 714), "*[t]hinking only of the scene*" (OH/P 724), or simply "*[t]hinking; putting things together*" (OH/P 740); to Tony Bream as "*excusable for not perceiving and irony so indulgent*" (OH/P 754); and to Paul Beever "*waiting in his woeful wonder*" (OH/P 755). As suggested above, few of these indications can be put down as genuine aids for performance.

The five facts just sketched affect vital areas of the conversion of the 1896 novel into the 1909 play, and, in isolated cases, can also throw light on how the novel itself grew out of a lost scenario. In broad terms, such facts do not seem to indicate systematic rewriting to express the original idea through the specificity of another medium, and so there are embarrassing structural identities and the replication of features of the source genre in unnatural contexts. All this raises the subject of motivation and invites questions as to James's awareness of what he was exactly doing and the artistic and professional satisfaction he derived from it. Emphasis has already been laid on the pragmatic significance of James's decision to serialize *The Other House* in the *Illustrated London News* and on the role played by this journal, according to Tucker (17-18), in the intensification of melodrama and sensationalism. Such significance, however, is unambiguously backed by a number of private expansions contained in his correspondence. In a 1908 letter to Solger mentioned above, James declares that he whipped up a novel "rapidly and at short notice . . . by the simple expedient of calling the Acts Books and 'writing in' such an amount of scenic indications and comment as would make a sort of equivalent or substitute for very good acting" (qtd. in Tucker 215n19). A similar description is offered in his letter to Auguste Monod of August 2, 1907, where he calls it a play "converted into a narrative in three 'Books,'" whose "material was economically used *tel quel*, as it stood, for the narrative purpose: the only small scrap of rearrangement . . . being the 3 or 4 opening pages. The rest is all 'scenic' and the thing thus perhaps a

considerable curiosity: which may be its only merit!" (*Letters to Benson and Monod* 107). Likewise, he discusses the composition of "Covering End" in a letter to Gosse dated October 12, 1898, admitting that it had "like *The Other House*, its base origin smeared all over it" and that he managed to reclaim *Summersoft*, the source play, "a little for literature—and for [his] pocket" by simply converting it "on the absolutely same scenic lines, into narrative" (*Henry James: Letters* 4: 82-83). But James's sincere, apologetic mood can also turn deeply offensive to his readership. "If *that's* what the idiots want, I can give them their bellyfull," he exclaims just after telling his brother William about the relative success of the book edition of *The Other House* in a letter dated October 30, 1896 (*Skrupskelis and Berkeley* 2: 416). On the foregoing evidence, both textual and contextual, an inevitable question suggests itself—to what extent can *The Other House* and its transgeneric history be viewed as a link in the alleged experimental chain that led to James's major novels of the early twentieth century?

### Working under the spell

In his introduction to the narrative version of *The Outcry*, Toby Litt argues that "one of the delights of reading the novel" (xviii) is coming across certain passages which, if critically inspected, would seem as crammed with theatrical leftovers as the worst one from *The Other House*. Though perfectly aware of James's *modus operandi*, and by no means ironic in his choice of words, Litt refrains from using a disapproving term like "embarrassments" and sticks to "delights," no doubt because this is exactly what he means. Rather than exceptional, his reaction is a predictable response to the Jamesian image of conscientiousness, craftsmanship, and aloofness that has prevailed, with ups and downs, since he became an established author. W. C. Brownell's 1905 statement that James "scrupulously followed his ideal" and "never, at any rate, yielded to the temptation to give the public what it wanted" (396) is a standard encapsulation of this image, though its truth value would hardly stand the test of evidence.

A side effect of canonizing James as an unworldly perfectionist has been the tendency to lend an appreciative slant to anything he does and to anything he says he does. In the case of *The Other House*, this has influenced the critical consideration of textual issues as well as the status of this work and its transgeneric history within his later, post-theatrical fiction. That James turned unacted plays into novels along lines of minimal possible effort and maximal commercial efficiency should not be in doubt by now. So it is baffling to see how his dealings with both source and target texts have been endowed with an artistic awareness that seems unwarranted. For instance, Isle and Greenwood, each in his own way, put a subtle construction on Rose's character to explain why James let "the reader see her only from outside" (Isle 74; see also 55, 56 and Greenwood 155). But they disregard the fact that the focal option is heavily constrained by James's generic choices and by the methods

he employed to switch between them. It would be more accurate to say that Rose's mental opacity results, on the one hand, from an attempt to boost suspense by underdetermining her personality and, on the other, from her early presence in the scenario of a *pièce bien faite*—in which plot stands above character—and not of a psychological drama, a situation that James readily transferred to the novel. Much in the same way, the generic fluidness of *The Other House* is often viewed as a deliberate quest for organic perfection. For Perosa, the novel is “a work of transition, where one can detect James's wavering between the stage drama and the novel,” not being “without significance that he was later . . . to rework it into a play” (55-56); Jenkins, for her part, sees the novelist struggling “with how to present this idea, first writing it as a play, then as a serial, and finally as a novella,” for “such desire as Rose exhibits defied formal dramatic and novelistic structure” (167). And yet James's motives for genre-switching do not seem primarily connected with genuine issues of aesthetic expression.

Leaving aside textual concerns such as characterization or organic adequacy, and following the thesis that his major novels of the early twentieth century were indebted to his theatrical experience,<sup>6</sup> *The Other House* has been considered an essential foothold for later achievement. Edel, the fountainhead of that thesis, views the novel as one in a “series of experiments Henry James embarked upon” (“Dramatic Years” 64),<sup>7</sup> whereas, for Isle, it clarifies the connections between “James's dramatic years and his succeeding period of experiment” (40). What can lead critics to overrate the transgeneric strategies employed by James, bypass his own derisive opinion on the whole process, and give *The Other House* a pivotal, experimental role towards his major fiction? The answer may lie in a peculiar understanding of what James called “the divine principle of the Scenario” (*Complete Notebooks* 115), i.e. the advanced planning of his narrative works with as much attention to scenic detail as if they were plays. Since *The Other House* was the first novel to grow out of a full-blown scenario and James called it later no less than “a precedent, a support, a divine little light to walk by” (*Complete Notebooks* 261), critics have granted this work a special status by projecting James's deep reverence for the *method* onto the *final product*, which, as we know, he was not very enthusiastic about.

Even as a method, the scenario principle is not the infallible recipe that seems to follow from James's description. When applied to narrative material, all it guarantees is that the resulting novel will conform to a specific type, not that it will be great or memorable in the intuitive sense of these terms, *The Other House* being a case in point. A narrative based on a scenario, for instance, will keep length and plot coherence under control and will not sprawl or proceed fitfully by creative outbursts; in other words, it will bring to the novel the requirements of the *pièce bien faite* in the best tradition of French drama which James had admired since his early contacts with the Comédie-Française in the 1870s. That the narrative version of *The Other House* originated in a play scenario whereas the notes for *The Spoils of Poynton* and *What Maisie Knew* were novelized directly despite their dramatic qualities is no

commendation either. It evinces that James knew very well the type of material he was dealing with and, acting on prejudice, reserved for the stage the story in which he found more scope for sensationalism. Finally, James's rapturous 1910 reference to *The Other House* as his "divine little light to walk by" may have been motivated by his nostalgic recollection that this was his first novel to be based on a full-length scenario, especially when he also calls it "a precedent" (*Complete Notebooks* 261). Yet it is worth considering another source for this allusion. Its context is a prolonged notebook entry spanning several days of December 1909 and January 1910 in which he develops the initial phases of his *donnée* for *The Ivory Tower*. After extolling the many virtues of the dramatic method, he sees his "Exposition made perfect—see[s] the thing as almost the Prologue, after the manner in which the first Book is the Prologue in *The Other House*." And immediately upon writing this, he launches his passionate apostrophe, "Oh, blest *Other House*, which gives me thus at every step a precedent, a support, a divine little light to walk by" (*Complete Notebooks* 261). Probably James proceeds here by association, the term "prologue" being the triggering device. His exposition is in the manner of a prologue; his only play to have a formal prologue is *The Other House*, which he had finished a few months earlier and was fresh in his mind; and this prologue, as argued above, is almost a replica of Book First in the novel. The chain is easily followed and provides a reasonable explanation of why *The Other House* is invoked by James in this context of his early notes for *The Ivory Tower*.

Though Henry James's New Critical image was prevalent for decades, it never went totally unchallenged. As far back as 1956, for instance, Alfred R. Ferguson gave an account of how James tried to combine his devotion to art with his urgent craving for fame and money; in the 1980s Marcia Jacobson and Michael Anesko respectively discussed James's imitation of topical genres in his quest for popularity and his costly growth as an independent, fully professional author; and more recently Amy Tucker has contributed a substantial monograph to researching the influence exerted by the readership of illustrated magazines on his work. Access to new material—mainly correspondence—has gradually refashioned James's image and disclosed human, all too human aspects of his authorial profile. Following this lead, an attempt has been made in this paper to present an orderly case against overestimating genre-switching in *The Other House* as a deliberate artistic pursuit by placing it in its right context and by highlighting evidence which has often been ignored or misinterpreted because it squared poorly with preconceived images. James lived mostly by his pen and often stooped to pot-boiling practices which extended to genre-switching—and that's all. To assume that he frequently exclaimed, "Success be hanged!—I want to sell," and acted accordingly whatever the cost, like Ray Limbert in his tale "The Next Time" (331), is just to present a whole, realistic image of him in the shifting context of the 1890s.

## Notes

1. *The Other House* (novel) 225; henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as OH/N.
2. Another later passage also hints at death by poisoning, as when Jean informs Tony that the governess will not allow Effie to have her meals at Eastmead and he asks, "Does she [the governess] apprehend poison?" (OH/N 116). This phrase also survives untouched in the play.
3. "When he is not putting dialogue into the mouths of . . . characters," says an early reviewer, "he is engaged almost wholly in providing that necessary description of their movements, their smiles and sighs and general stage-business, which in the theatre the spectator would see with his own eyes . . . The reader preserves an annoying sense of this to the end of the book" (unsigned rev., Gard 262).
4. *The Other House* (play) 742; henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as OH/P.
5. For a comprehensive account of how point of view operates in drama, see McIntyre.
6. This thesis is not without opponents; renowned critics such as Auchincloss, Wilson, and especially Geismar (ch. 4) basically argue that James's theatre is so poor that it can't have been "the key to modern fiction" (Geismar 127).
7. Twenty years later, however, Edel apparently changed his mind and, in a review of Isle's book *Experiments in Form*, called *The Other House* "one of James's least experimental novels" and "a piece of hackwork" (563).

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